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AUTHOR Reid, Jayne
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ABSTRACT

Predictors of occupational choices and of on-the-job effectiveness for graduates of secondary school stenographic training programs were investigated. Prior to graduation, 192 stenographic students were tested in measures of attitude, personality, and stenographic achievement. These students were then classified according to occupational choices made, with employer evaluations being obtained for those in office occupations Attitude toward dependability and motivation for original coursework enrollment were significantly related to occupational choices. Personality variables were significantly related to employer evaluations, but the most significant correlates of employer evaluations were I.Q. score and performance on the National Business Entrance Examination stenographic examination. (Author)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF SELECTED ASPECTS OF ATTITUDE, PERSONALITY, AND ACHIEVEMENT TO THE POST-HIGH SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT OF SENIOR STENOGRAPHIC STUDENTS

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By Dr. Jayne Reid

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF SELECTED ASPECTS OF ATTITUDE, PERSONALITY, AND ACHIEVEMENT TO THE POST-HIGH SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT OF SENIOR STENOGRAPHIC STUDENTS

By Dr. Jayne Reid

Introduction--For many years business educators have concerned themselves with the interaction of attitudes, personality traits, and skills by those stenographic and secretarial workers judged effective on the job. Most of the research, however, was of the survey type, with few attempts until recently to incorporate empirical measurement devices into research designs. Program evaluation, too, has been accomplished primarily through questionnaires sent to students after graduation or by rating scales mailed to employers of those in the Federally funded vocational programs of instruction. Longitudinal studies, extending over a span of time, are scarce in the literature of research from business education, too, so that up to the time of this study nothing had really been done to determine the predictive validity or nonvalidity of the National Business Entrance Examination for stenographers, a criticism brought out in the reviews of that examination in the Mental Measurements Yearbooks. Despite this shortcoming, however, the National Business Entrance Examination for stenographers is the only work-sample type achievement test in stenography available for use on a high-school level or for business education research. The National Business Education Association has indicated interest in revising the National Business Entrance Examination, and with that impetus supporting this research, an attempt was made to determine:

1. Predictors of occupational choices made after graduation.
2. Predictors of on-the-job effectiveness for those employed.
3. The predictive validity or nonvalidity of the National Business Entrance Examination for stenographers.
4. Differences in performance on measures of attitude, personality, and stenographic achievement at the conclusion of training in one of three high-school stenographic training programs--Cooperative Office Education, Vocational Business and Office Education, and Traditional Hour-a-Day Elective Program of shorthand instruction.

Procedure--A total of 192 subjects enrolled in stenographic training programs at six middle-class, comprehensive high schools in the Cleveland, Ohio area were selected for this study. The schools chosen had similar student populations and were within easy commuting distance of downtown Cleveland, an area reporting a "critical" shortage of secretaries and stenographers. These schools had similar testing programs and counseling records, making possible valuable data to be included in the study.

The in-school evaluations obtained for the 192 subjects of this research consisted of the following:

1. Two standardized tests for personality traits
   a. The Gordon Personal Profile, yielding four traits
   b. The Gordon Personal Inventory, yielding four traits
2. Dudycha's Attitude Scale for Clerical Workers, concentrating upon nine aspects of dependability
3. The National Business Entrance Examination for stenographers, measuring transcription achievement.
4. Information from the schools' standardized testing programs
   a. Verbal ability scores from either the Differential Aptitude Test or the National Educational Development Test
   b. I. Q. score

5. Other indices of achievement
   a. 9th- and 10th-year English grades
   b. 12th-year shorthand grade
   c. Over-all grade point average (GPA)
   d. Class rank, stated as a proportion

The above measures comprised the independent variables incorporated into this study.

The dependent variables changed according to the particular hypothesis to be tested. They consisted of the following:

1. Level of job obtained
2. Employer's Evaluation of Personality
3. Employers Evaluation of Attitude
4. Employer's Evaluation of Skill
5. Employer's Total Evaluation

Perhaps the most significant criterion was the employer's administrative decision to dismiss from employment.

Students were tested and asked to complete a questionnaire immediately prior to graduation. After graduation they were queried to determine their occupational choices, defined as "the full-time activity in which they were actually engaged when queried." Dates of initial employment were tabulated for those who accepted jobs throughout the six-month post-graduation period, and employers were asked to return an Employee Evaluation Scale three months from the date of initial employment.

Telephone queries of employed subjects of this investigation revealed the actual activities performed on the job, which became the basis for the assignment of levels on the basis of the degree of skill required in the performance of duties. The breakdown of levels, ranging from the most complex (Level 1) to the most routine (Level 5) follows:

Level 1 - Specialized secretaries and stenographers (medical, legal, and technical dictation)
Level 2 - General secretaries and stenographers including dictaphone transcribers
Level 3 - Clerical workers, general office workers, cashiers (clerical), and credit clerks
Level 4 - Equipment operators (teletype, computer, keypunch, and phone)
Level 5 - Mail girls, pages, and file clerks

The statistical design involved multivariate analysis of variance, using a .05 level of significance.

Significant Results--Those subjects expressing nonvocational motivations for selecting stenography appeared in all three in-school training programs (Cooperative Office Education, Vocational Business and Office Education, and the Traditional Hour-a-Day Elective Program of shorthand instruction. The nonvocationally motivated subjects scored significantly higher in Ascendancy (leadership), Original Thinking, and Attitude toward Dependability than the vocationally motivated subjects and were more predominantly enrolled in college classes in both related and nonrelated courses of study.

For the over-all group of employed subjects, personality variables were significantly related to the employer's evaluations of personality and of attitude. Personality variables were also significantly related to the level of job obtained, with those subjects evidencing the most negative attitudes toward dependability actually employed in the highest-level jobs.

When employed stenographers and secretaries were isolated from the over-all group of employed subjects for study, personality variables were not significant in employer's evaluations. For this group of employed workers, the cognitive factors were more significantly related to employer's evaluations of on-the-job effectiveness than were attitudes or personality traits. Both I. Q. Score

and the National Business Entrance Examination Score were significantly related to the Employer Evaluation of Skill. Performance on the National Business Entrance Examination was also a good predictor of the Level of Job obtained. For five who had been dismissed from employment, their scores on the National Business Entrance Exam ranged from a low 39 to 0.

No significant difference in performance was obtained on any of the measures of attitude, personality, or stenographic achievement for subjects enrolled in any of the three in-school training Programs--Cooperative Office Education, Vocational Business and Office Education, or Traditional Hour-a-Day Elective program of shorthand instruction prior to graduation.

Conclusions and Recommendations--Since those scoring highest in leadership, original thinking, and attitude toward dependability were more predominantly enrolled in college coursework, employers who value these attributes in a secretary may need to turn to the community college or college product.

The finding that those with the most negative attitudes toward dependability were in the highest-level jobs was attributed primarily to two factors: (1) The manner in which jobs were obtained, and (2) Employer hiring practices. Personal conversations with employed subjects revealed that in most instances jobs were taken because of "availability." In addition, there was a tendency on the part of some large organizations to place entry-level workers on low-level jobs for a type of on-the-job training.

The finding that the personality variables were significantly related to the employer's evaluations for the over-all group of employed workers but lost their significance in the employers' evaluations of employed stenographers and secretaries led to a question posed for future research. Is it possible that when skills are minimal, as with general clerical workers, the evaluator is less willing to overlook undesirable personality traits than he would be when skills are at a peak and highly visible, as with stenographers and secretaries?

Other specific recommendations of the study follow:

1. That personality measurement be made a part of the revised National Business Entrance Examination for Clerical Workers.

2. That personality inventories of the type used in this research be used for counseling in the orientation stage of career planning.

3. That, where possible, longitudinal follow-up be made a part of training program evaluation, in view of the way jobs are obtained.

4. That research be undertaken on a statewide basis to determine whether or not differences, in fact, can be established that would justify the time expenditure of a two-year vocational block-time program.

5. That empirical measurement be made a part of program evaluation.

6. That the National Business Entrance Examination, in its revised format, be used for program evaluation on a statewide basis so that norms can be established for high-school students.

7. That consideration be given to experimenting with a senior-level-only Intensive Office Education Program.

8. That passing scores on the National Business Entrance Examination for stenographers be based upon current hiring practices of employers and that the test time be reduced to one hour.

9. That revisions be made in both the methods of administration and methods of scoring the National Business Entrance Examination for stenographers.